

Following extensive flooding in some areas in the aftermath of *Hurricane Irene*, the Oneida County Health Department is advising residents whose private water well supplies may have been impacted to take appropriate precautions to ensure their water is safe.

Private Well Water

If the area around a private well has been flooded or there is suspicion or risk that the well has been contaminated from flood waters, residents are advised to stop drinking, cooking, brushing teeth and bathing with the well water and disinfect the well. Wells in flooded areas may be contaminated with waterborne germs that can cause serious illness. Until the well has been properly disinfected and tested, water for these purposes should be disinfected as mentioned below or bottled water should be used.

Warning signs that a well may be contaminated include: debris, mud or water and mud stains that indicate the well was flooded; erosion or instability in the ground surface around the well; damage to the well casing; a loose well cap; taste or appearance of the well water; or any visible wires or components.

If the well has been or is suspected of having been flooded, the well pump should not be turned on until the well has been thoroughly assessed and repaired as needed by a plumber or other well professional. Beware of electric shock if your basement or electrical system has been flooded. No one should drink, bathe, brush teeth or cook with well water after a flood until the well has been restored by proper disinfection and flushing. Unless there is an indication that the well has been impacted by spilled fuels, oil or other chemicals it should be safe to use the water for flushing toilets.

Until the well has been properly disinfected, bottled water should be used for drinking, washing or cooking. Tap water can be used if it has been disinfected by one of the following methods.

- Disinfection by boiling water - this method produces the safest water. Bring the water to a rolling boil and maintain a full boil for one minute. After cooling, it is recommended that oxygen be restored to the water by pouring it back and forth between to containers. This will also improve the taste of the water.
- Disinfection with iodine or Chlorine tablets - **Check the expiration of the tablets before using then carefully follow package directions.** One tablet is usually sufficient for one quart of water. **Double the dose if the water is cloudy.**

After a well has been properly disinfected and chlorine has been flushed out of the water system, the water should be tested for bacteriological contamination. You should consider retesting your well several weeks after flooding since groundwater contamination after a flood may impact the well.

For more information on disinfecting contaminated water, see:

<http://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/water/drinking/flooding/docs/privatewells.pdf>